



# United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge  
95 Sterling Highway, Suite 1  
Homer, Alaska 99603



April 20, 2015

City of Homer Parks and Recreation Commission  
491 E. Pioneer Avenue  
Homer, Alaska 99603

Dear Commissioners:

Thank you for facilitating a public process for city residents to voice their vision for the future of Bishop's Beach. The USFWS, Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, hopes to work in partnership with the city to implement any future changes, especially those that would impact USFWS-administered public lands. Our fundamental desire is to provide people safe access to their public lands for outdoor recreation in the coastal environment in a way which protects wildlife and natural beach processes. A collaborative process with the USFWS, City, and the community is both better and more likely to be successful than having the USFWS striving for a singular approach of strict protection of the federal lands around Bishop's Beach, with minimal or no public access.

The USFWS fully endorses year-round restrictions on vehicle traffic in both the Beluga Slough area and on Area 7 of Bishop's Beach (the upper and lower berm as well as the space between them in accordance with current city ordinances). Vehicles in the berm area cause damage to vegetation, wildlife, and reduce opportunities for both family-friendly and tranquil outdoor recreation. It is not the place of the USFWS to dictate what happens on the entire beach zone of Homer, but at least on the land we administer, we want to see natural vegetation, abundant wildlife, and safe, family-friendly outdoor recreation. It seems as if our community's memory of the existing beach policy has faded, and what was a vehicle-free zone has transformed back into a heavily impacted area. While no beach policy will meet everybody's wishes, a no-vehicle policy which welcomes people while protecting vegetation and wildlife is laudable and achievable; indeed, it seems to be largely included in existing ordinances which prohibit driving on beach berms. Enforcing, and, where necessary, strengthening or clarifying such ordinances would meet U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service objectives for the property we manage in the area.


The USFWS is also sensitive to complaints from parents who have stopped bringing their kids to play in the berm area because of the abundant dog feces and encounters with aggressive dogs off-leash. We've also previously testified that off-leash dogs are a hazard to wildlife. This winter alone we have four confirmed reports of dogs attacking and killing sea otters on Homer's beaches. A leash requirement would help protect pet owners from the strict liability they face under the Marine Mammal Protection Act for any disturbance or harm done to sea otters or other marine mammals caused by their pets. We've observed numerous instances of other wildlife including waterfowl and shorebirds being disturbed by dogs on the beach and in the slough, and there has been at least one human injury due to a dog bite this year on the property we administer.

In summary, we support

- a driving ban in Area 7 of Bishop's Beach on the storm berm and emerging secondary berm
- a leash law & clean-up rule for the Bishop's Beach and Beluga Slough area (not merely voice control)

We thank the Parks and Recreation Commission for the tremendous effort that has gone into crafting a more harmonious future for our backyard and Homer's backyard slice of the wild – Bishop's Beach. We look forward to working with the City on education and outreach efforts as any plans are implemented.

Sincerely,

  
Steve Delehanty  
Refuge Manager  
Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge